For Hitler and the German military, 1942 was a key turning point of World War II, as an overstretched but still lethal Wehrmacht replaced brilliant victories and huge territorial gains with stalemates and strategic retreats. In this major reevaluation of that crucial year, Robert Citino shows that the German army's emerging woes were rooted as much in its addiction to the war of movement--attempts to smash the enemy in short and lively campaigns--as they were in Hitler's deeply flawed management of the war. From the overwhelming operational victories at Kerch and Kharkov in May to the catastrophic defeats at El Alamein and Stalingrad, Death of the Wehrmacht offers an eye-opening new view of that decisive year.

Building upon his widely respected critique in The German Way of War, Citino shows how the campaigns of 1942 fit within the centuries-old patterns of Prussian/German warmaking and ultimately doomed Hitler's
expansionist ambitions. He examines every major campaign and battle in the Russian and North African theaters throughout the year to assess how a military geared to quick and decisive victories coped when the tide turned against it. Citino also reconstructs the German generals view of the war and illuminates the multiple contingencies that might have produced more favorable results. In addition, he cites the fatal extreme aggressiveness of German commanders like Erwin Rommel and assesses how the German system of command and its commitment to the independence of subordinate commanders suffered under the thumb of Hitler and chief of staff General Franz Halder. More than the turning point of a war, 1942 marked the death of a very old and traditional pattern of warmaking, with the classic German way of war unable to meet the challenges of the twentieth century. Blending masterly research with a gripping narrative, Citinos remarkable work provides a fresh and revealing look at how one of historys most powerful armies began to founder in its quest for world domination. This book is part of the Modern War Studies series.

This is another superb work by author Citino, although the publishers editor did a poor job of filtering out typos and spelling mistakes. Nonetheless, I recommend this book to any person who wishes to understand why the Germans were able to do so well, so many times, throughout World War II.

This book should be read AFTER reading Citinos Path To Blitzkrieg and The German Way Of War in that order. Unfortunately, The Path To Blitzkrieg is now out of print, but it is absolutely necessary for the reader to comprehend the nature of German officer training, as well as leadership training down to the Assistant Squad Leader level. No other army in history has been so thorough in training its leaders; the American Army being no exception in spite of incorporating much of the Wehrmachts leadership training techniques in its training regimen after World War II. Unfortunately, American officer training is a mere shadow of the German even today, particularly in staff functions, both due to far-foreshortened courses and missing a General Staff for guidance and espirit. Please read my reviews of both books here on Amazon.

This work applies the lessons learned from other two books to the year of 1942 for the Germans on two fronts, the Soviet Union and North Africa. Both fronts demonstrate the same principles of waging war from the German side with aggressive and capable commanders, excellent staff support, and incredible performances by the ordinary soldiers doing their duty.

In many respects the North African campaign was a unimportant sideshow (to the Germans, but not to the Italians or British), and the inability of the Italians to successfully supply Rommels army across the Mediterranean Sea (due to Ultra decoding of sailings and convoy information) not only prevented Rommel from taking Egypt, but brought
him within an ace of losing his entire army. Citinos analysis of Rommels actions and the slow, even almost dim-witted British methodology in waging war was brilliant. Montgomery turned all his battles into ones of attrition using overpowering resources, and the German tactics of using movement to compensate for inferior numbers and material became a non-starter. Nonetheless, when the Germans could accomplish rapid movements and bring adequate power to its main point of effort, the Wehrmacht could still win local victories against the British (& Americans) as late as the winter of 1944/45.

On the Eastern Front, the campaign of 1942 was decisive. Citino presents the recovery of the Wehrmacht in the Spring of 1942, not as fully regaining its 1941 strength, but to a level whereby it could regain the initiative. Citino correctly points out the recent official German history as containing prescient discussions by already knowing the outcome when the information available at the time would not lead to those conclusions. As the author stresses, believing that the superior leadership of the German officer corps and the superior training and bravery of German troops would overcome gross deficiencies in men and material might have been hubris, but the German officers and men apparently actually believed it. As a result, they were able to push far beyond the culmination point, and achieve much more than could reasonably be expected. In many situations the results were achieved by the smallest of formations, -- a handful of tanks or a few hundred men left effective out of a whole division. In a sense, the Germans pushed themselves to win with the last man standing, something no other army has consistently attempted to do in modern times. Author Citino marvels that the Germans were able to come within two miles of their objective in the Caucasus, and even De Gaulle was similarly impressed. When De Gaulle remarked while touring Stalingrad after the war that the fight there was unbelievable, a Soviet general agreed that the Soviet troops had performed great heroics. No, no, De Gaullle said, That the Germans got so far.

Citino correctly did not put all the blame on Hitler for the debacle, but he should have lessened the influence from Megargee and Wette when it came time to spread the blame lower than Halder and the OKW/OKH. The operational command system began to fall apart when the traditional independence of German commanders was restricted by headquarters. These were new rules, and the German field commanders were unable to adjust for the good of their commands and the conduct of the war. Of course it did not help that tanks, ammunition, food, manpower, air support, and especially fuel were in desperately short supply, but these were problems that the Wehrmacht had surmounted before. In the 2nd half of 1942 it could not. The whys and wherefors make up this book.

The author did not overlook the effect of the Soviet retreats before the Wehrmacht became stretched to the limit, and that too was known to the German high command. But the attack simply could not be stopped --
German tradition required that it be pressed to the limit. It was, and defeat resulted.

Although Manstein would achieve a monumental success in February and March of 1943 in destroying or crippling four Soviet armies and retaking Kharkov and Belgorod, the German bolt had been shot. From Kursk onward, only localized successes were possible when the Wehrmacht was able to maneuver -- remaining in fixed positions meant certain eventual defeat. Eisenhower would adopt a similar strategy as the Soviets and grind down the German army without giving it a chance to maneuver. The German way of war could not cope nor adjust. A not-so-modern army in command thinking and warrior attitudes could not ultimately prevail against a modern army (or armies) fighting battles of attrition and using overwhelming superiorities in the air, on the ground, and in industrial production of military supplies and equipment.

Purchase and read this book.

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